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AUTHOR Tuttle, William M., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

A teacher's observations on the marked contrast between the development and behavior of elementary school children in Tennessee's Cumberland plateau and their counterparts in New York City's Greenwich Village vividly demonstrate the regional basis that still accounts for a variety of cultural variations. And yet, place of upbringing is just one of several determinants that help shape children's lives in the United States. Psychologists also identify effects beginning with the mother-child dyad, and further include the child's relationship to parents, siblings, neighborhood, peers, and school. Popular culture also plays a role. Another psychological perspective examines the child's "ecology," or physical and social surroundings. Class influences child development in many ways, affecting children's play, sexuality, mental health, and other areas. A child's culture and socialization are intertwined, stressing the importance of race, ethnicity, and religion in childhood development. Anthropologists point to significant differences among U.S. children in such characteristics as breast feeding, sexual discipline, and attitudes about schooling. Since World War II, diversity, not uniformity, has marked the U.S. landscape. In the post World War II period, considerations of group diversity gave way to generalizations about "the American character." It was contended that childhood socialization processes could explain the society in general, and that a new "modal" or national personality had arrived. Analysis of the family as an institution reflecting class differences, population movements, and economic change was lacking. More recent waves of immigrants have taken more obvious pride in their cultural distinctiveness. (Contains 40 footnotes.) (LBG)

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"Childhood Diversity and the Fallacy of 'The American Character': Class, Culture, and Child Rearing during the Second World War"

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by

William M. Tuttle, Jr.
Professor of History
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

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During the Second World War Claudia Lewis moved from New York City to eastern Tennessee.[1] A preschool teacher, Lewis had been teaching three, four, and five year olds in a nursery school in Greenwich Village, but she wanted to broaden her perspective on childhood development by relocating to another part of the country. Arriving in Tennessee's Cumberland plateau, she soon discovered she had entered a world that was dramatically different from the one she had just left. The touchstone of that difference was the children themselves.

The children of the Cumberland were placid and shy. Much of the time they stayed by themselves, shunning the vigorous group play and spirited conversation that had so characterized the New York City children. Lewis had not gone to Tennessee to do research for a book, but when she "realized that there were marked differences between the mountain children and those ... in Greenwich Village," she started "to look more closely at the structure of the community. I wanted to find out what kind of

[1] I wish to express my deep appreciation to the many people who have helped me, beginning with the scholars who commented on an earlier verion of this paper at the 1988 meeting of the Organization of American Historians. These commentators were John A. Clausen, Hamilton Cravens, Linda Gordon, and Arlene Skolnick. For their careful reading of drafts of this paper, I also would like to thank John Bodnar, Joseph R. Boskin, Sue Brand, Lynn Dumenil, Glen H. Elder, Jr., David M. Katzman, Michael E. Lamb, Annette Lawson, Paul Mussen, Jill Quadagno, Robert R. Sears, Howard Shorr, and Marilyn Yalom.

homes and upbringing made these children so unresisting and 'easy to handle.'... Why was there so little rebellion in the mountains?... What was the meaning of their outwardly peaceful, placid behavior? And why were these children so shy for months at a time?... Was there any relation between the ... talent of the New York children and their energetic, self-assertive ways? Between the mediocre performances of the mountain children and their compliant, apparently untroubled behavior?"[2] While Claudia Lewis did not discover the answers to all these questions, she did describe profound differences in the child-rearing environments of these two societies. What startled her was that these differences existed in a nation whose population--with the monumental exception of nonwhites--was reportedly being rapidly blended in the American "melting pot."

Between 1941 and 1945 the United States was at war and, with few exceptions, its citizens rushed to the nation's defense. America had a "man-sized" job on its hands, but "the American people," including millions of women war workers, would unite to conquer the enemy. According to journalists and scholars, patriotism on the home front was not only forging national unity, but also obliterating invidious distinctions based on social status, religion, and ethnicity. War movies featured ethnically diverse soldier, sailor, and air corps crews. A Jew, an Italian,

[2] Claudia Lewis, Children of the Cumberland (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), xvii.

an Irishman, a Pole or a Swede, all fought together in Bataan, Guadalcanal Diary, Sahara, The Purple Heart, and numerous other films.[3] And this was entirely appropriate, for the United States was fighting a "people's war."

More important, however, practically all observers agreed that the communications and transportation revolutions, along with the migration of millions of people from the South to the North and West, and from the farms to the cities, were combining to destroy traditional regional and rural-urban distinctions. The rapid spread in the past two decades of electricity, the automobile, radio, the telephone, and motion pictures had accelerated social change in most parts of the country, and had exposed dissimilar peoples to mainstream popular culture. Sooner or later, most commentators predicted, the dominant culture would subsume all its variants; many argued that the new era of cultural homogeneity was already fast settling upon the country.

The United States did undergo lasting transformation during the era of the Second World War. But change, no matter how profound, is seldom absolute; nor does it happen overnight. Claudia Lewis, for example, was struck by the persistence of certain child-rearing practices in the Cumberland region. "Small babies are seldom out of their mother's arms, and are nursed

[3] See Lewis Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," Cinema Journal, VII (Winter 1967-68), 18-19.

whenever they cry. Often they are not weaned until they are well along in their second year. Children are always to be seen with their parents at buryings ... [and] at square dances. They are never left at home or put to bed early." Lewis's description of the Cumberland children was evocative of premodern Europe during which children became part of the adult world at any early age. "Parents," she wrote, "do not seem to expect their children to live on a schedule that differs very much from their own. Meals are the same for all members of the family.... Children live a life very close to that of their parents, a life involving few restrictions." At the same time, and unlike many boys and girls in other parts of the country, these children were expected to be unquestioning in their obedience to elders. "They are whipped or threatened with whipping if they do not obey. Discipline is theoretically of the old 'authoritative' kind, yet the actual routine of living is far from a strictly regulated one."[4]

[4] Lewis, Children of the Cumberland, xv-xvi. Many of th patterns observed by Lewis persisted into the 1960's; see Ja . E. Weller, Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 58-86. In a helpful appendix (161-63), Weller presented "a comparative summary" of middle-class American and southern Appalachian "personal characteristics," "family life characteristics," and "relationships with others." The differences in each category were extreme. Also relevant are Harry M. Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area (Boston; Little, Brown, 1962); Richard A. Bell, "A Poverty Case: The Analgesic Subculture of the Southern Appalachians," American Sociological Review, 33 (December 1968), 885-95; Robert Coles, Children of Crisis, Volume II: Migrants, Sharecroppers, Mountaineers (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 75-76, 82-84, 509; John B. Stephenson, Shiloh: A Mountain Community (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968); Elmora Messer Matthews, Neighbor and Kin: Life in a Tennessee Ridge Community (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1965).

Obviously the Cumberland children and their Manhattan counterparts were very different in their development and behavior, even though reared in the same nation at the same time. In this case as in many others, geography had evinced its determinism, vividly demonstrating the localized and regionalized bases of a variety of cultural variations.[5] But place of upbringing was only one of several determinants that helped shape children's lives in the United States. Psychologists of childhood socialization have identified a number of other crucial influences beginning with the mother-child dyad and expanding to include the child's relationship to her or his father, siblings, neighborhood, peers, and school. Increasingly, too, they have assessed the impact of popular culture, particularly the electronic media, on children.[6]

Another psychological perspective examines the child's "ecology," that is, the physical environment and "social space" in which children are reared and grow up. Small-town childhood, for example, with its smaller schools, afforded greater

[5] Cultural geographers have studied significant American regional differences in religion, folklore, personal consumption, architecture, and language, to mention just a few areas. See Wilbur Zelinsky, The Cultural Geography of the United States (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

[6] See Boyd R. McCandless, "Child Socialization," in David A. Goslin, ed., Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 791-819; Joshua Meyrowitz, No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

opportunities for student participation than did big-city childhood. The latter offered superior academic and cultural opportunities, but in the metropolitan schools, there simply were not enough positions on the football team, or roles in the senior play, for everybody.[7] Only a handful of studies have focused on the ecology of rural-urban differences, but Alex Inkeles, a leading scholar of comparative childhood socialization, has ventured some generalizations: "The greater isolation and family centeredness of rural life means a slow social awakening for the rural children, greater fear of strangers, and slower development of imagination and language skills. By contrast," he continued, "both the responsibilities early assigned to them, and their contact with animals and nature, seem to yield the rural children early and highly developed sensory motor functioning." Moreover, rural children enjoyed greater freedom to explore their environment, and they did so "less under the immediate surveillance of adults...." These children also had more frequent contact with their fathers than did suburban children whose commuting fathers were absent from the home most days. Childhood was thus a differential experience depending upon the ecology--"the real-life settings within which people behave"--

[7] See Roger G. Barker, Ecological Psychology: Concepts and Methods for Studying the Environment of Human Behavior (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1968); Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright, Midwest and Its Children (New York: Harper & Row, 1955); and Roger G. Barker and Paul V. Gump, Big School, Small School (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1964); Urie Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

whether on farms or in villages, suburbs, or cities.[8]

It is thus significant that in 1940 most of America's children were rural, even though most of the country's adults were urban. Demographers have pointed to 1920 as the year the United States became an urban nation. For the first time in the nation's history, according to that year's federal census, more Americans lived in cities and towns than on farms and in villages. By 1940, the urban margin was somewhat more pronounced, but there was a major exception: while most of America's population lived in areas defined as urban, a slight majority of the nation's children still lived in areas defined as rural. And this fact had stunning regional and ecological implications.

Quick to grasp the situation were the women and men who gathered in Washington, D.C., in 1940 for the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy. "Numerically," the conferees observed, "the Nation's children under 16 in 1940 were almost equally divided between city and country (49 percent and

[8] Alex Inkeles, "Social Structure and Socialization," in David A. Goslin, ed., Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 621. See also Anne Buttimer, "Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective," Geographical Review, LIX (1969), 417-26. Likewise, farm children in the 1940's had different experiences depending upon such additional factors as locale, race, and ethnicity. For a comparison of six different farm family types, see Harvey J. Locke, "Contemporary American Farm Families," Rural Sociology, 10 (June 1945), 142-51.

51 percent), but in proportion to [the] population of all ages there were a good many more in the country than in the city." While America's children "constituted only 23 percent of the urban population," they made up "34 percent of the population on farms, and 30 percent of the population living in villages and other nonfarm rural communities." Variations in the fertility rate--and thus in family size--were major factors explaining the distribution of children across the United States. "The [fertility] rate for the rural-farm population was highest, that for the rural-nonfarm came next, and the rate for the urban population was lowest."[9]

Since farm families tended to be larger than city families, it stood to reason that agricultural states would have a larger proportion of children than industrial states. This was indeed the case, and the range separating the states was vast. States in the Deep South, for example, had a much higher percentage of children than did states in New England, the Middle Atlantic, and the West Coast. The following 1940 census figures show the number of children under 15 years of age per 1,000 adults in a sampling of these states:[10]

[9] U.S. Children's Bureau Publication 272, White House Conference on Children in a Democracy: Final Report (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), 14, 20.

[10] Congressional Record, 91 (July 26, 1945), 8056. See also U.S. Children's Bureau Publication 294, Facts about Child Health 1946 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946), 1-2.

Highest Ratios		Lowest Ratios	
678	New Mexico	260	District of Columbia
672	South Carolina	308	California
633	Mississippi	321	New York
628	North Carolina	332	New Jersey
619	Alabama	340	Washington
599	Utah	341	Connecticut

Families with large numbers of children tended to be poorer than smaller families, as well as more poorly educated and less healthy. As the 1940 White Conference reported: "Not only do more children live in the poorer sections of the country, but they are also concentrated in households at the lower income levels."[11] Health surveys published by the Social Security Administration in 1939 concluded that "the economic status of the family varies inversely with the number of children under 16 years of age in the family."[12] Many large families waged an ongoing battle to make ends meet. John A. Clausen, the sociologist, has written that, at the very least, the large family struggled harder to achieve a higher standard of living and to provide children with opportunities to become upwardly mobile. At worst, large size militated against the prospect of family success in either of these areas. In contrast, children

[11] U.S. Children's Bureau, White House Conference on Children in a Democracy, 17.

[12] Ibid., 18.

from smaller families generally enjoyed greater economic resources and parental interest in school progress, and showed "higher achievement motivation and academic performance" as well as greater "occupational success" later on. Family size also increased the possibility that the parents would be autocratic and authoritarian. Having babies closely one after another was a financial, physical, and emotional burden. Parents in such families were more likely to use physical punishment instead of rewards to control behavior. In fact, Clausen noted in his research that "differences in frequency of physical punishment associated with number of children were in general greater than differences between working-class and middle-class families of the same size."[13]

Although no one in the 1940's made the effort to try to understand the full importance of such regional and ecological differences in children's lives, various social scientists at the time did explore other aspects of the variety of childhood experiences then available to America's children. During the decade, for example, they studied social-class differences in American communities. Sociologists and psychologists, such as Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, searched for answers to a number of interrelated questions. "Whom does the child associate

[13] Clausen, "Family Structure, Socialization, and Personality," in Lois W. Hoffman and Martin L. Hoffman, eds., Review of Child Development Research, volume 2 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1966), 2-3, 9-15.

with?" they asked. They wanted to know whether children were born into the town's "best families," or whether they came from "loud, ignorant, common people," or whether their origins lay somewhere in between, for example, with the "good families" of the middle class. These social scientists concluded that class not only dictated one's status in the community; more important, it also deeply influenced the type of child-rearing practices followed by parents. The only stumbling block--and it was formidable--was that in the 1940's these investigators disagreed over whether it was the middle classes, or the lower classes, which were "warmer, more accepting, and permissive" in their attitudes.14

But if there were disagreement about the effects of social class on child-rearing practices, there was little disputing that from the very beginning of a child's life, class influenced his or her development in many basic ways. In the 1940's, while middle-class mothers and children enjoyed prenatal and pediatric care, such was not the case for many lower-class children who were delivered not in hospitals, but in their homes by midwives or relatives. From birth on, the middle class's ability to pay usually resulted in superior nutrition, clothing, housing, health care, and education for their children. Years later, in

[14] Allison Davis and John Dollard, Children of Bondage (Washington: American Council on Education, 1940), 260-61; William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Inquiries into Social-Class Variations in Child Rearing during the Era of the Second World War" (unpublished paper, 1988).

discussing the gross inequities that existed among American children, the historian John Demos wrote of "the reality of the 'stacked deck' versus the myth of equal opportunity."[15]

Another example of social class's differentiating influence is ordinality or birth order. Every first-born child was for a while an only child, but then class exerted itself. In the middle classes the first-born, especially if a son, was the heir apparent, the one of whom the parents expected the greatest academic achievements. And, indeed, the first-born tended not only to perform better in the classroom, but to go farther in school than his later-born siblings. But as John Clausen has written: "Among the less well-to-do... especially in larger families, the first-born child is likely to have to leave school and go to work, since his parents will have several younger children to support and will frequently expect the oldest child to contribute to the family income as early as possible."[16]

Social class also influenced children's play, sexuality, and mental health, among other important areas of life. Child's play, for example, depends on role models; and as Gregory P.

[15] Demos, Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and The Life Course in American History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 197.

[16] Clausen, "Family Structure, Socialization, and Personality," in Lois W. Hoffman and Martin L. Hoffman, eds., Review of Child Development Research, volume 2 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1966), 21-22.

Stone, the sociologist, has written, "we ought to acknowledge that one child's fantasy is another child's reality. The probability that the roles children enact in their dramas will be assumed or encountered in adult life is very much restricted by their position in the various orders of stratification--income, prestige, ... their rural or urban residence, their 'race' or ethnicity, or their sex."[17] Likewise, Alfred C. Kinsey and his associates identified class differences in childhood attitudes toward sexuality. The distinctions were already discernible in children as young or three or four, and they involved such sexual topics as "the ease or embarrassment with which such a child discusses genitalia, excretory functions, anatomical distinctions between males and females, ... the origin of babies, ... and kindred items...." By ages seven or eight, the differences were even greater. While the lower-class boy at that age "knows that intercourse is one of the activities in which most of his companions, at least his slightly older companions, are engaging," the ten-year-old boy "from the upper level home is likely to confine his pre-adolescent sex play to the exhibition and manual manipulation of genitalia, and he does not attempt intercourse because, in many instances, he has not yet learned that there is such a possibility."[18]

[17] Stone, "The Play of Little Children," in R. E. Herron and Brian Sutton-Smith, eds., Child's Play (New York: Wiley, 1971), 11.

[18] Kinsey et al., Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948), 440-47.

Social class was indeed central to people's lives. "Remarkable though it seems," Melvin L. Kohn, the sociologist, has written, "one aspect of social structure, hierarchical position, is related to almost everything about men's [and women's] lives--their political party preferences, their sexual behavior, their church membership, even their rates of ill health and death. Moreover," Kohn continued, "these correlations are not trivial; class is substantially related to all these phenomena."[19]

As for mental health, the effects of social class were both obvious and poignant. For men and women treated for psychiatric disorders, most of the poor suffered from psychotic illnesses while the preponderance of the middle classes and the well-to-do received treatment for neuroses. One survey done after the war described the clients from the "low social economic status" as being "rigid, suspicious," lacking in "trust of others," and having "a fatalistic outlook on life," "feelings of futility," and a "lack of belonging." One can speculate that the effects were harsh on the lower-class children whose parents were dissociated from reality and so unhappy.

Although none of the studies on social class and mental illness was conducted during the Second World War, but in the 1950's, there does seem to be significant constancy in the relationship between these factors over time. See August B. Hollingshead and Frederick C. Redlich, "Schizophrenia and Social Structure," American Journal of Psychiatry, 110 (March 1954), 695-701; John A. Clausen and Melvin L. Kohn, "The Ecological Approach in Social Psychiatry," American Journal of Sociology, 60 (September 1954), 140-51; Hollingshead and Redlich, Social Class and Mental Illness (New York: Wiley, 1958); Jerome K. Myers and Bertram H. Roberts, Family and Class Dynamics in Mental Health (New York: Wiley, 1959); Jerome K. Myers and Lee L. Bean, A Decade Later: A Follow-Up of Social Class and Mental Illness (New York: Wiley, 1968).

[19] Kohn, Class and Conformity: A Study in Values (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition, 1977), 3. For a study published on the eve of the Second World War which related poverty to children's health, housing, and education, see Justin

Similarly in the 1940's, anthropologists sought to identify significant cultural influences in childhood and child rearing. Having explored the connections among culture, socialization, and personality, these anthropologists discovered that the child's culture and her socialization were intertwined, and they thus stressed the importance of ethnicity, race, and religion in American childhood development. Since the child's first meaningful relationships are with her or his mother, father, and the other members of the family, these people become the child's primary socializing agents. Of central importance, of course, is the mother, who normally feeds and cares for the baby. Anthropologists identified significant group differences in breast feeding and weaning, toilet training, and sexual discipline, as well as in play patterns, the carrying out of chores, initiation rites, and attitudes about formal schooling.[20]

Wise Polier, Everyone's Child, Nobody's Child: A Judge Looks at Underprivileged Children in the United States (New York: Scribner's, 1941), especially 269-77.

[20] Victor Barnouw, Culture and Personality (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, third edition, 1979), 33. Among the most studied child-rearing differences were those existing among Native Americans. While the Hopis, for example, encouraged their boys to be cooperative and mild-mannered, the Cheyenne Indian boys were taught to be warriors--brave and assertive. See also Erik H. Erikson's comparison of child training among the Sioux and the Yurok Indians: "Childhood and Tradition in Two American Indian Tribes," in Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray, eds., Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture (New York: Knopf, 1949), 176-203.

A fascinating study of socialization differences done after the war compared several ethnic groups--Zuni Indians, white Texas "homesteaders," Mormons, and others--occupying a single physical environment, the town of Rimrock, New Mexico. "Families influenced by different religious and political value systems," Robert A. LeVine, the anthropologist, has written, "differ significantly in how they see fit to train their children, and some of these value systems involve tighter and more conscious control over the details of socialization than others." The groups in Rimrock emphasized distinctly different dominant values and types of behavior as important to socialize; the Zuni paid special attention to regulating aggression and promoting "harmony," while the homesteaders focused on individualism and emphasized "success," and the Mormons epmhasized "virtue" and "rigid sex impulse control." "Thus, "LeVine concluded, "what is relatively unregulated and unplanned in one group is the object of intensely deliberate socialization in another."[21]

Furthermore, were all of these variables of the 1940's to

[21] LeVine, "Culture, Personality, and Socialization: An Evolutionary View," in David A. Goslin, ed., Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 518; Evon Z. Vogt, Modern Homesteaders: The Life of a Twentieth-Century Frontier Community (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955); Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodtbeck, Variations in Value Orientations (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1961); John W. M. Whiting et al., "The Learning of Values," in Evon Z. Vogt and Ethel M. Albert, eds., People of Rimrock: A Study of Values in Five Cultures (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 29-30, 83-125; William M. Tuttle, Jr., "'Old Ways Die Hard': Cultural Variations in American Child Rearing during Wartime" (unpublished paper, 1988).

be held constant, there would still remain the crucial differentiating factor of gender. In recent years, scholars--notably, Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan--have contrasted mother-daughter bonds with mother-son bonds. Girls derive their basic sense of identity from experiencing themselves as like their mothers. Consciously and unconsciously, they emulate their mothers' behavior, and throughout childhood they continue to identify with the same-sex parent who was their first love object. Boys, on the other hand, develop a male-gender identity that depends upon seeing themselves as different from their mothers, and requiring separation from them. Following the thesis that the girl child experiences herself relationally, Chodorow has written: "The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate." Accordingly, through the life course, males tend to base their identity on ideals of autonomy and individual success, while females tend to base theirs on attachment, intimacy in personal relationships, and on subordinating their success to the care of others.[22]

[22] Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 169; Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Linda K. Kerber et al., "On In a Different Voice: An Interdisciplinary Forum," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 11 (Winter 1986), 304-33; Mary Field Belensky et al., Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review, 91 (December 1986), 1061-63, 1065.

But "object relations," as developed by feminist scholars, is not the only psychological window onto crucial differences of gender. Urie Bronfenbrenner, the developmental psychologist, has discovered that, in child rearing, "girls are exposed to more affection and less punishment than boys, but at the same time are more likely to be subjected to 'love-oriented' discipline of the type which encourages the development of internalized controls." One short-term result was that girls were more obedient and "in general better socialized than boys at comparable age levels." Another result reported by Bronfenbrenner was that "girls tend to be more anxious, timid, dependent, and sentitive to rejection."[23]

In the United States during wartime, there was thus a great array of childhood situations, whether based on race, social class, ethnicity, religion, region, physical and social ecology, or gender--or any number of combinations of these factors. For many of America's children--indeed, one would hope, for most of them--child rearing provided warmth and a positive environment for growth and development. Other children--(here, too,

[23] Bronfenbrenner, "The Changing American Child--A Speculative Analysis," Journal of Social Issues, 17 (1961), 9-10. Bronfenbrenner has also analogized that girls--in whichever order born into the family--were likely to be treated as first-born children because girls, "receive more attention, are more likely to be exposed to 'psychological' discipline, and end up more anxious and dependent, whereas later children, like boys, are more aggressive and self-confident." See also Stanley Schachter, The Psychology of Affiliation (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1959).

meaningful statistics are nonexistent)--suffered grievously, the victims of myriad forms of insult and abuse. But what was undeniable during the era of the Second World War was that diversity, not uniformity, marked the American landscape.

Claudia Lewis understood this fact. After the Second World War she returned to New York City to finish her book, Children of the Cumberland. Continuing to be intensely curious about the differences she had observed, she pondered whether "one could picture a map of the United States in terms of its children--not necessarily a flat map on a page with black dots for the Negro children in the South, yellow for the Orientals in California, and brown for the Indians of the Southwest." No, she had in mind a developmental map that would probe "the various influences at work in molding small children." The "East," she mused, might appear "as a great city of brick and concrete, with a small child playing in canyonlike streets. Quite a contrast would be the 'Southwest' with the little Navajo girl spending her entire time out on the arid plain, in the shadow of high blue mountains...." Lewis's map also included "the Southern mountain children" along with the "children of the Northwest, who can look up daily to snow-capped peaks; children of the corn country, whose familiar 'woods' are waving seas of corn; children who live beside the real seas...; to say nothing of the children of our thousands of 'towns,' with their back-yard, house-close-to-house, main-street

surroundings."[24]

Such a map, Lewis continued, would have to feature children and not just their physical surroundings. Indeed, "a psychologist's map would probably teem with the children themselves--eating, playing, obeying and disobeying, fighting, laughing, teasing; shy children and aggressive children; the maladjusted, and the happy and secure." Still, the "imaginary map" would be incomplete without also distributing representations of the child-rearing practices followed in the various regions and locales as "one way of getting a grasp of what the [childhood] differences are, and more especially why they exist." For example, the psychologist would point out that in the Southern mountains the children of that map "are going to bed without any fuss (because the whole family goes at the same time), while up North in a well regulated modern city home the battle against bedtime may go on night after night." Similarly, the map could identify child-rearing differences in breast feeding and weaning, toilet training, discipline, tolerance of sexual curiosity, and other topics. Finally, the "map would include children in school as well as at home," for here, too, certain behavioral characteristics seemed to follow regional and cultural patterns.[25]

[24] Lewis, Children of the Cumberland, xii.

[25] Ibid., xii-xiii.

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While not denying that people continue to change throughout the life course, few people--whether psychologists, parents, or casual observers--would disagree that childhood is the most important formative period of a person's life. In fact, it is because childhood experiences have lifespan consequences that it is instructive--and even fascinating--to take a fresh look at the great variety of situations in which children found themselves in the 1930's and 1940's. These girls and boys, born between 1933 and 1945, are now in their forties and fifties. And they, in turn, have reared another generation of Americans--namely, their own children who are now young women and men in their teens and twenties.

A rapidly emerging field in both psychology and sociology is that of lifespan studies. Today there is an appreciation of the importance of, and the unique challenges represented by, all stages of the life course ranging from infancy to old age. Historians' most popular explanation of these stages is still Erik Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man," published in 1951 in Childhood and Society.[26] Strict Freudians adhere to the

[26] For insightful discussions of historians' use of the Eriksonian model, see David Hunt, Parents and Children in History: The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 11-25, 191-96; John Demos, "Developmental Perspectives on the History of Childhood," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, II (Autumn 1971), 315-27.

childhood psychosexual sequence of oral, anal, phallic, and latency stages. Piagetians have demonstrated that children progress through cognitive stages of development, each of which results in a radical reorientation of the child's worldview. Even some committed behavioral psychologists, who formerly posited an "age-irrelevant" view of human development, now concede that cognition springs from biological maturation and proceeds in recognizable stages. Women and men who missed an encounter with Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man" in college or graduate school had another opportunity to read about developmental stages when Gail Sheehy's Passages: Predictable Crises in Adult Life was published in 1978. People who wanted to read more deeply about "passages" could pick up The Seasons of a Man's Life (1978) by Daniel Levinson and others. And the literature on lifespan development continues to appear at a healthy rate.27

This growing recognition of stages also reinforced the belief that if each developmental stage was significant, the most formative of all were those of childhood. This seemed true whether the domain was physical, social, or emotional growth, or

27 For a full discussion of this topic, see See William M. Tuttle, Jr., "A Historian's Exploration of Psychology: An Approach to a New Psychohistorical Synthesis" (unpublished paper, 1985).

the development of intelligence.[28] Keeping this in mind, it is instructive to return a final time to Claudia Lewis's "imaginary map" of American childhood and child-rearing practices. Reflecting differences based on region, "social space," the physical environment, race, ethnicity, social class, and other factors, her map highlighted America's diversity during the first half of the 1940's. Beyond that, it identified the developmental

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[28] Regarding the growth of intelligence, psychologists today tend to conceptualize intelligence as a convergent stream, beginning with "fluid intelligence" (defined as "a capacity to perceive relationships and integrate them mentally") but crystallizing over time "when fluid intelligence is mixed with formal education and other raw materials of the culture." The fact that 50 percent of the variance in intelligence is predictable at a certain age does not mean that half of intelligence has been acquired by then. The issue for contemporary psychologists is one of prediction, not one of calculating the amount of intelligence acquired at developmental mileposts along the way. (Jack Fincher, Human Intelligence [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976], 179-80; and the essays in Orville G. Brim, Jr., and Jerome Kagan, eds., Constancy and Change in Human Development [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980]. I am thankful to Michael E. Lamb, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and John C. Wright, University of Kansas, for clarifying this issue for me.)

Older perspectives on the measurement of intelligence did try to measure actual growth. Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist at the University of Chicago, plotted the developmental pattern of intelligence. Bloom judged that half of all growth in human intelligence occurs between birth and age four, and another 30 percent between the ages of four and eight. Thus, half of a child's intellectual development is completed before he or she enters school, and 80 percent is done by the time the student finishes the second grade. Characteristics in other domains--for example, the biological, social, and emotional--were also fundamentally shaped at an early age. Moreover, Bloom concluded, "At late stages in the development of a characteristic, only the most powerful and consistent environments are likely to produce marked changes in the individual." (Bloom, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics (New York: Wiley, 1964); the quotation appeared in Saturday Review of Literature (June 15, 1968), 59.)

consequences that accompanied these differences; it was clear that American childhood varied widely across the map. And based on childhood's variations in the United States at this time, and on the recognized persistence of characteristics acquired during childhood, it was natural to expect that such behavioral diversity would persist as these children became adolescents in the later 1940's and 1950's, and as they entered young adulthood in the 1950's and 1960's.

In the eyes of postwar American scholars, however, such was not the case. When they looked at American society, they saw at work the "melting pot," shared values, and peaceful social change through economic growth. In 1950, for example, just four years after the publication of Children of the Cumberland, a very different kind of book appeared, one that would serve as a landmark analysis of modern American society in the postwar period. In David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character, considerations of group diversity gave way to generalizations about "the American character." Riesman contended that the childhood socialization processes at work in America could explain the society in general, particularly the behavioral characteristics of that "ideal type" composed of the urban, middle class. "Thus," he wrote, "the link between character and society--certainly not the only [link], but one of the most significant ...--is to be found in the way in which society ensures some degree of conformity from the

individuals who make it up. In each society, such a mode of ensuring conformity is built into the child, and then either encouraged or frustrated in later adult experience."[29]

Furthermore, Riesman wrote, the American character had changed from what it once was. The "inner-directed" Americans of the Victorian age had responded to their internal "gyroscopes." "Self-willed" and "aggressive," not to mention sexually inhibited, they practiced such "production values" as hard work and self-denial. Their personalities were perfectly congruent with America's era of industrial expansion and rapid population growth. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the society demanded a new personality type, the "other-directed" man or woman who could conform to new bureaucratic structures, who was "shallower, freer with his money, friendlier, more uncertain of himself and his values, more demanding of approval...."[30] Moreover, in the modern evolution toward other-directedness, the parents had lost some of their authority as agents of

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[29] Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961 edition), 5-6.

[30] Ibid., 19. See also the insightful discussion in Daniel Miller and Guy E. Swanson's The Changing American Parent: A Study in the Detroit Area (New York: Wiley, 1958), 55, 57-58, 109-14. Miller and Swanson found that child rearing also depended on the kind of employment held by the head of the household and whether that employment was "entrepreneurial" or "bureaucratic." Entrepreneurial parents, for example, tended to train their children for self-control and independence, while bureaucratic parents encouraged their children to be spontaneous and work well with others.

socialization, being replaced by the peer group, the mass media, and more permissive canons of child rearing.[31]

Considering that the goal of Riesman and his colleagues was to analyze the American character as manifested in personality formation, they paid surprisingly little attention to the contemporary changes in child-rearing philosophies. Indeed, they disdained what they saw as "a tendency in current social research, influenced as it is by psychoanalysis, to overemphasize and overgeneralize the importance of very early childhood in character formation," and they decried the "almost techological attention ... focused on what might be called the tricks of the child-rearing trade: feeding and toilet-training schedules."[32] Another shortcoming of their analysis was that it concerned itself only with the middle classes, not the lower classes, and

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[31] Ibid., 47-48.

[32] Ibid., 38. It is interesting that Riesman slighted child rearing, since a persuasive argument can be made that the American middle-class's emphasis on permissiveness, sociability, and democratic cooperation, especially during the Second World War, was instrumental in the development of "other-directed" Americans. Moreover, large-scale business and governmental organizations required the "other-directed" bureaucrat who emphasized "loyalty, morale, and interpersonal adjustment," and who was very unlike unlike the "inner-directed" self-made man, the entrepreneur and builder who was aggressive and took risks. See Michael Zuckerman, "Dr. Spock: The Confidence Man," in Charles E. Rosenberg, ed., The Family in History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 192-207; William M. Tuttle, Jr., "'Then and Now': American Child-Rearing Advice in Transition" (unpublished paper, 1988).

only with city people, not rural people.[33]

In 1954, another important statement of the American character was published, David Potter's People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character. Affluence, Potter wrote, had altered socialization processes in modern America. Wanting for very little, American children enjoyed abundance in their housing, feeding, and clothing. Moreover, the comforts and technological advances available hastened the shift from child rearing that was parent-centered to forms that were child-centered. "Today," Potter wrote, "... the disposable diaper, the diaper service, and most of all the washing machine... make it far easier for the mother to indulge the child in a regime under which he will impose his own toilet controls in his own good time." Henceforth, fewer parents pursued the practice of placing their child on the potty at the same time every day, leaving her or him there until the child produced a bowel movement. Another household improvement, central heating, made it possible for children to wear fewer and lighter clothes indoors, thus enhancing physical freedom and comfort. Abundance also produced labor-saving devices and service industries that freed parents to "give an unprecedented share of their time" to their children. In a variety of ways, then, abundance encouraged permissiveness in child development and thus shaped the American character at

[33] Carl N. Degler, "The Sociologist as Historian: Riesman's The Lonely Crowd," American Quarterly, 15 (Winter 1963), 483-97.

mid-century.[34]

Riesman and Potter were not alone in asserting that a new "modal" or national personality had arrived on the American scene. During the Cold War years of the 1950's psychologists, sociologists, and other social scientists also began to discover "the American character."[35] Some historians did not stop at mere description; in self-congratulatory fashion, they heralded the American character as evidence of the country's uniqueness and greatness among nations. One historian, however, John Higham, criticized what he termed "the cult of the 'American consensus,'" or "homogenizing our history."[36] Earlier generations of historians, following trails blazed by Charles Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, and others, had focused on societal tensions and conflicts in which class was arrayed against class, section

[34] David Potter, People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 198, 201.

[35] One widely-cited study has been Alex Inkeles and Daniel J. Levinson, "National Character: The Study of Modal Personality and Sociocultural Systems," in Gardner Lindzey, ed., Handbook of Social Psychology (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954), II, 977-1020. Some scholars, however, went well beyond Inkeles and Levinson, who issued this caution: "The reliance on collective documents or data on child-rearing methods probably contributes in significant degree to the fact that national character studies ordinarily designate only one modal personality pattern for any given population. Unimodal analysis seems hardly justified, particularly in the case of large-scale, heterogeneous national populations such as that in the United States [998]."

[36] John Higham, "The Cult of the American Consensus," Commentary, 27 (February 1959), 93-100.

against section, farmers versus business people, and human rights versus property rights. But the historiographical themes of the 1950's were consensus, homogeneiety, stability; the new scholarship emphasized the national character and the American experience, that is, similarities rather than differences. Brilliant historical studies were published on these themes, among them Louis Hartz's The Liberal Tradition in America (1955) and Daniel Boorstin's The Americans: The Colonial Experience (1958). These scholars, while not denying the existence of conflict in the American past, ascribed it less to societal divisions than to psychologically disturbed personalities. "A psychological approach to conflict," Higham explained, "enables historians to substitute a schism in the soul for a schism in society." In other words, the United States was fundamentally a good society, one in which most people shared in the "consensus" of attitudes and beliefs. If a citizen did find fault with American society, it did not necessarily mean that America was in need of correction; it usually meant that the person was "irrational." Certainly this affirmation of the status quo was profoundly conservative, but it was consonant not only with the Cold War ideology of the 1950's, but also with a Freudian perspective that equated the "norm" with the "good" and "biology" with "destiny."[37]

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[37] Ibid.

It was perhaps inevitable during the nationalistic, conformist years of the "silent fifties" that scholars from a variety of disciplines would trumpet the virtues of "the American character." But not all of them joined in the applause. In 1954, Irving Howe, the literary historian and critic, wrote an essay entitled "This Age of Conformity" in which he lamented that intellectuals' attitudes toward American society had shifted from alientation to acceptance.[38] More than that, however, such a perspective, when applied to the study of individual development and family life in America, distorted reality by portraying the United States as a culturally homogeneous society in which the "ideal type" was the white American family living comfortably in suburbia.

Tamara K. Hareven, a leading historian of the American family, has criticized scholars of the national character for picturing "the 'typical' family as representative of the [entire] social order...." For one thing, she wrote, "they lack an analysis of the family as an institution reflecting class differences, population movements, and economic change." By focusing on "the family as the microscopic representation of the social order, they fail to focus on the dynamics shaping family life and organization. The result," she continued, "is a study of cultural attitudes rather than social conditions. The

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[38] Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity," Partisan Review, 21 (January-March 1954), 7-33, 238-40.

typology of a national character represents only the dominant culture, and leaves out the varieties of family experience among other groups in society."[39]

The experiences of American children at this time, in all of their diversity, support Hareven. And in order to understand this cohort of Americans--and the postwar society of which they were an evolving part--the scholar must return to the earlier era in which they were in infancy, early childhood, play age, or school age. The clues to their adolescent and adult behavior lie in the experiences they had as children on the American home front during the Second World War. And in order to appreciate America's cultural diversity, it is also necessary to return to this generation's childhood experiences, particularly to the child-rearing practices followed by the parents, whether those practices were articulated in child-rearing advice columns or passed on from mother to daughter and father to son. For the basic fact is that child rearing, however formulated and articulated, is the main vehicle for cultural transmission from one generation to the next.

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[39] Tamara K. Hareven, "The History of the Family as an Interdisciplinary Field," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, II (Autumn 1971), 402. Another scholar, Manford Hinshaw Kuhn, has made the same point, for the 1940's, by studying "five divergent American family types": see "American Families Today: Development and Differentiation of Types," in Howard Becker and Reuben Hill, eds., Family Marriage and Parenthood (Boston: Heath, 1946), 131-68.

Any helpful, empathetic understanding of children's lives on the home front would necessarily be dichotomous, since children lived on two essentially different levels. Such an understanding would not only reveal what American children had in common as they experienced life on the home front during the Second World War, but also illuminate the widespread cultural diversity that distinguished the United States's population during the war.

Perhaps, too, such an understanding would contain lessons for Americans who today are living during the third greatest wave of immigation in their nation's history. This immigration has been underway since the early 1970's. Indochinese, Mexicans, Central and South Americans, and people from various Caribbean islands are entering the country in record numbers; many are political refugees from civil wars in which the United States backed the losing side, usually an unpopular dictator. For three years in a row--1977, 1978, 1979--the numbers admitted to the United States surpassed those for any year since 1924. In the ten years between 1975 and 1985, the United States received 4.7 million Asian, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic black people. Were one to add in the number of uncounted immigrants, the total would increase considerably. Contrary to some earlier patterns, which saw a heavy influx of young, working-age men seeking economic opportunity, the current immigration consists largely of families. Women and children account for two-thirds of all legal immigration to the United States today. While some of the

better-educated newcomers have settled in the suburbs, most live in neighborhoods populated largely by other people like themselves.[40] These people from far-flung countries take pride in their cultural distinctiveness. Like earlier immigrants, they have their own businesses, churches, benevolent and mutual aid societies, and foreign-language newspapers, as well as a diversity of attitudes about the rearing of their children. With this constant infusion of new arrivals, the United States is once again a nation of many immigrants.

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[40] "Lands of Our Fathers," Newsweek (January 17, 1983), 22; New York Times, September 9, 1985, December 14, 1986. Another factor heightening cultural separation has been racial segregation, which continues to be pronounced in America's inner cities. For example, the level of segregation of black students remained essentially unchanged between 1972 and 1984, with nearly two-thirds of blacks attending predominantly minority schools. For Hispanics, school segregation has increased in the 1980's, especially in schools in which 9 of 10 students were from racial minorities (New York Times, July 26, 1987).